



idk: Swapping subjects and objects in service-learning research

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Summary

This poster illustrates how the Carnival Arts program at Barry University engages non-traditional students of diverse races, cultures, and age and offers an alternative approach to service-learning in higher education. The approach addresses the issues raised by Dan W. Butin's (2010) critique of the current limits of service-learning, which is itself limited by its focus on the European critique of modernity and an assumption of the whiteness of the field. Acknowledgment of the practice of service-learning by non-traditional students in the context of disciplines that in themselves challenge the epistemological foundations of academia further unsettles the field, demanding alternative methods of teaching, learning assessment, and program evaluation as well as a reconsideration of who is the subject and who is the object of both service-learning practice and research.

The participants in the Carnival Arts program at Barry University required both students and evaluators to take turns before and after each session asking each other questions, swapping positions as the subject and the object of the evaluations. To the written questions posed at the beginning of each session, the

youth frequently responded “idk” – teen textspeak for “I don’t know.” These three letters identified the teens’ lack of connection to the material presented, while also asserting the teens’ participation in an alternative knowledge regime based on mastery of a language associated with another technology of communication.

“idk” thus encapsulates the notion that not-knowing something in one epistemology can also signal knowing something in an alternative epistemology. To truly capture the learning promoted by Carnival Arts required the examination of multiple artifacts. This demand for formal, written evidence of learning undercut the content of the Carnival Arts program, which relayed the ways in which traditions and histories excluded from the European worldview were preserved and transmitted through music and dance in the Caribbean via vehicles such as Carnival. What resulted was the adoption of a new primary mode of Caribbean performance: improvisation.

References

Butin, D. W. (2010). *Service-learning in theory and practice: The future of community engagement in higher education*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Gilroy, P. (1993). *The black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness*. London: Verso.